

13 Shots in 8 Hours!

The shot hardness of Buffaloes is legendary. If the first shot doesn't kill properly, the day can get pretty long.

We run after the buffalo like the savages. Thomas, the tracker, unerringly finds the change in the thickening. It doesn't take long before he points to shredded lungs and bright blood. A great relief for me, but not necessarily for Simon, the PH. It is 7.40 a.m. The first shot came ten minutes ago. My first on a buffalo. At this point, I cannot imagine how long it will be before I can take possession of the prey.

Following unknown changes arouses a kind of childlike curiosity and sharpens the senses. With this hunting trip I enter new hunting territory in two ways: It is my "first time" in Zimbabwe and also on buffalo. Accordingly, joy and expectations are great.

Like-minded people

As a greeting at the camp, Simon is the first person I meet. A certain relief and joy can be seen in the fact that he can roam through the bush with me as a roughly the same age than with some other hunting guest. We are immediately sympathetic, which is not unimportant if you spend a few days side by side. The greeting with his father, PH Nixon Djingai, is equally warm. A man with natural authority and a big heart, of whom there should be much more. The entire staff here at the picturesque camp on the edge of the Nuanetsi river bed gives you a direct, family feeling.

The next morning it goes out early. The nights are short, so we have always - contrary to my habit - hiked into the bunks between 9 and 10 in the evening. But with a 300,000 hectare hunting area with sometimes bad trails, we sometimes have to put up with a good hour's drive to reach the respective game area.

For the first few days it is a high plateau on which Simon expects Dagga Boys at this time of the year. Especially when there is a light drizzle, he has driven them a lot in this area. So today. At dawn we reach a sand track that is ideal for skiing. We don't have to wait long for a suitable track. We follow her for about an hour and then unfortunately stand where, unlike the buffalo, for us hunters it ends: the border to the Gonarezhou National Park. The individually walking Dagga Boy has arrived in the safe harbor at least for today.

In the afternoon we find another track that we follow for a few hours. It is fascinating to see how Thomas and Simon keep on the track and explain their work to me with subtle instructions. At such moments, you realize how many skills people have lost in the context of urbanization. In view of the approaching twilight we unfortunately have to give up this trail at some point.

Daily increase

The procedure does not change the next day. Again we drove the same slope, again we found promising tracks, again we followed them. But today I'm experiencing an increase from the previous day: Sudden cracking of branches, puffing and deep rumbling reveal the buffalo herd, which is less than 100 meters in front of us in the thick Mopane forest. Unfortunately, the beating wind tells us a little later. The trembling floor is evidence of this. We take our legs in our hands and cut off the path of the herd. When we arrive on a path, we prepare ourselves. And the first wild cattle push their massive bodies out into the open, attack the path and end the spook. As expected, there was no Dagga Boy in this herd of maybe 15 heads.

The next increase on the third day of hunting: Since early morning we have been following a group of two "old men". In the dense we run into them three times, which repeatedly causes the buffalo to flee briefly. Around noon we decide to take a two-hour rest, which the buffaloes will also have. We mark the point on the GPS device and drive by car to a rest area on the edge of Gonarezhou. After the lunch break, it goes from the other side to the buffalo rest area. Thomas unerringly finds the place where we find various indications that a few minutes ago wild cattle were still having a siesta.

A little later we are suddenly within striking distance. But the buffalo move away from us into much denser vegetation. The stalking works. We set up at about 30 to 50 meters. Simon addresses a suitable buffalo. However, he is always the last, inaccessible to us in the thickness. Even as we approach again and a little later a third time. It's just not enough for a sure shot. In this vegetation, the field of fire ends at 30 meters at the latest.

Day of the days

At some point he had to come, the day I would prey. It would have been the first hunting trip to no avail. That couldn't and shouldn't be. No sight on the first day of hunting, sight on the second, sight with a suitable buffalo without a chance to shoot on the third - the logical consequence on the fourth day of hunting: sight with a matching buffalo and chance to shoot!

Simon already opened me up at the camp the evening before, his new strategy for the fourth day of hunting: Instead of heading for the north of the concession, the aging Hilux should head south into the famous Krugs Corner, the border area between Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique, as already described in the article "In the realm of Daggas" was described in JWW 5/2019 (pages 20-27).

The landscape is very different here. Almost like a jungle, the vegetation meanders to great heights, is as dense on the ground as man-sized blackberry thickets in our region. It is just beginning to dawn as we meander through a dense sand path. Less than 200 meters away, we hear broken branches. Elephants! Less than 100 meters away from us, they are enjoying their breakfast. But everything is so dense that we cannot see any of the pachyderms.

We follow the piste much more slowly and carefully than usual in search of promising tracks. But unfortunately unsuccessful. After about an hour, we return to the pick-up and head for another corner in the area. There are all kinds of Lalapalms - palm trees, from the plant sap of which the people who live here in the open air produce schnapps. When we

meet some of these "black burners" on the side of the road while they happily pass the self-distilled spirits around, we ask them if we can smell their drink. After that it is now definitely clear that we do not want to drink it under any circumstances.

Often comes unexpectedly

Whenever you least think about it, it happens. So now too. Thomas discovers promising tracks on the dark, fine and stony path. While I'm waiting in the car, he, Simon and Gamewarden Soul jump out of the car and swarm out. When Thomas takes a few steps into the thicket on the left, we suddenly hear heavy game breaking through the density. Immediately in front of Simon, two Dagga Boys break out of the thicket, raid the path and flee towards the national border. Simon is now fighting for every second. In a flash we have everything important together and follow the fugitives, who are still a minute ahead. Once again, it is a dream to see how Thomas follows the buffalo escape corridor precisely and rapidly.

After about 800 meters I see one of the colossi standing at about 150 meters in the open area. It secures in our direction. I hiss at Simon, but he doesn't hear me. A few seconds later, however, he also discovered him, immediately set up the stalk and releases the buffalo to me. But a shrub is in the way. I have to change the shooting stick again. It is not my usual one with two pads, but a tripod with only one. Despite a high pulse and rapid breathing, I shouldn't be hesitant. The buffalo will not be able to hold us for a long time at a good 100 meters. Not thinking through this thought yet, my first buffalo shot breaks around 7:30 a.m.

The Dagga Boy then escapes to the left with his mate. uncertain about the hit seat, I am ready to shoot, make sure Simon has the right buffalo and send a second bullet behind at well over 200 meters. I am certain that this .375 H&H missed its target with a Norma-PH partial jacket bullet, because I did not take into account the enormous distance on the second shot with this slow cartridge.

Keep calm

The buffalo disappear in the dense, we run after like the wild. Thomas unerringly finds the substitution and everything that was described at the beginning. I naively believe in a short search for the dead. But first we keep a clear head and take a tactical break. Like every day, Thomas and Dijj, our driver, prepare the food. Today elephant is on the menu, along with the usual corn porridge. The spicy meat stew tastes slightly Asian and very tasty. Due to the blood of the lungs, I am still optimistic that we will experience a short search for the dead after the early lunch break. Of course I also hope for Simon's optimism, but it's a little more subdued than mine.

It finally starts around 10 a.m. Under wind we enter the thicket from the other side. Very carefully, step by step, in constant alert. The tension can be felt in every pore of the body. Searching for welded buffalo is dangerous. Some of them were fatal to some hunters. So caution is more than justified. After about 20 meters, Thomas decides to climb a medium-high tree to possibly spot the buffalo from there.

And that's exactly how it is. The shot man lies in the wound bed about 60 meters ahead of us, while his companion stands next to him. Thereupon Simon climbs the tree, sets up and tries to shoot the sick fighter pointedly from behind. Unfortunately, the .458 Lott does not

end the buffalo's suffering, just like the second bullet thrown behind. At the shot, the two Dagga Boys separate. The patient now changes to an even denser and larger one thickening. We follow the blood trail up to this wall of vegetation.

I can't get anything positive out of Simon's expression. And a little later he confirms my impression with the sentence that no hunter wants to hear from his hunting guide: "I think we have to leave him alone for today and come back tomorrow." This uncertainty triggers a great deal of discomfort for me. Thomas's suggestion to climb a tree again is almost relieving. A glimmer of hope that I now cling to like a Leopard to a trunk! The crown of the tree that Thomas climbs may be six or seven meters high. The tracker is at lightning speed and with a remarkable ease above. It takes a while, but at some point he has our buffalo in view. Now Simon is climbing up the tree.

I'm doomed to wait with Soul. Anxious waiting, long waiting, whispering discussions in the tree top, looks that move up and down, back and forth. After endless five minutes, Simon asks me to climb the tree too. And now the good impression and the sportiness is over. Fortunately, I don't have a cameraman with me!

Nothing helps. I can't do it by myself. And so Soul has to push me from below over my very best to reach the first branch fork of the tree. The weapon is passed behind, and a little later I crouch in the crown. The boys show me where the buffalo sits in the wound bed at about 70 meters. But I can't make it out with the best will in the world. Simon wants to give me the shot, but I wave it off. He should end it.

Wounded warrior

Just as he prepares to do so, life comes into the wild. The gray colossus rises out of nowhere, suddenly stands in full width and size in a sheer thickness and looks as angry in our direction as only a wounded warrior can. In a flash I am ready to shoot. But Simon, who is sitting a little above me on the left, hisses to me: "Don't shoot yet!" He was probably not ready himself. Barely a second later his .458 Lott thunders above me. Immediately afterwards, I can also use mine .375 H & H from Sako 85 get rid of another shot at the Dagga Boy before the "steam locomotive" picks up speed. The next bullet is repeated at lightning speed into the chamber and sunk into that of the buffalo. Simon's weapon also breaks the silence of the Mopane bush again.

The buffalo is already far to the left when I propose the ninth bullet to it. In the shot it collapses and disappears. Single jiggling branches where he went down. A good sign!

Final final

We all feel great relief now. And pity for Thomas, who had to endure the cannonade between us. Fortunately, there is no UVV hunt in Zimbabwe. The authors would have been sniffed during this maneuver.

Now Simon is also certain that we have seen the final. We wait another five minutes and then carefully walk towards the prey. But when we are within 20 meters, we hear the old fighter's heavy breathing. His will to live is unbroken. We carefully withdraw and approach him from the other side. There we have a better field of fire if it accepts us, lying on the edge of the thicket. The PH and I are waiting at a safe distance behind a thick trunk.

Simon's body language says a lot. Without losing words, he exudes authority, professionalism and determination. As if he wanted to say: "This is not a game, my friend." Whenever my gaze wanders, he exhorts me: "focus!" I nod in agreement and turn my gaze back to the place where we suspect the buffalo . "It's the dead buffalo that kill!" Diji, Thomas and Soul are busy cutting a path for the pick-up with machetes. Simon wants to cover the last few meters to the buffalo on the safe vehicle. When the path is cut, we climb up and drive off. Diji at the wheel, Simon, his son Prince, Thomas, Soul and me on top. After endless searching, Thomas discovers our wounded warrior at just five meters. But it can hardly be seen, it is so dense here. Leave shot number ten and eleven Simon's weapon. However, the famous death bellow, which some refer to in the realm of fables, cannot be heard. Even the twelfth shot from my weapon brings no certainty. But with the 13th cartridge around 3:30 p.m., the death bellow finally gives us certainty. It goes through marrow. The whole tension falls away from us: joy, pure joy for everyone involved. We laugh, celebrate, sing and dance. My first buffalo is lying. I feel deep gratitude. This hunt couldn't have been more exciting! Goodbye Simon, goodbye Krugs Corner.